

**Southwestern In Focus
EL PASOAN RECALLS
EXCITING TIMES IN U.S.
AND WITH VILLA IN MEXICO**

By Art Leibson
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A book could be written about his experiences, with much left over, if Hoard would ever tell the truth and the whole truth about his life and times, and consent to its publication. But even from the safe distance in space of El Paso, and times—a half-century—he still draws the line at publicly discussing the feudin' and fightin' he watched since he started work at the age of 16. He never had to use a gun but he learned how, and often had one close by that came in handy in bluffing mean gun-toters.

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Hoard's next move was to Oklahoma. Getting a telegrapher's job with the Rock Island cost him a pint of whiskey but it was a good bargain. By now he had been forced to learn how to handle the business end of a gun, for reasons he prefers to soft-pedal.



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BACK TO LUFKIN

He did return to tough Lufkin, where he became assistant postmaster, serving under the only Republican in town. Then he took a job as a personnel man with the Lufkin Land & Lumber Co., a subsidiary of the giant, Long-Bell, and after three years he was sent to Mexico as assistant manager of the Madera Co., owned by the Mexico North Western Railway. His one year of Latin was a big help in learning Spanish before going to Mexico and he had a good knowledge of the language in handling work crews of Mexican nationals.

In 1916, six years after the Madera revolution broke out, in January 1910, Hoard went to North Carolina, managing a lumber company with 800' men on the payroll. The company had been unsuccessful when he

took over its management but within a year it was on a paying basis. Hoard was a man to watch and when the revolution settled somewhat below the border he returned to Mexico, rising first to the vice-presidency of the railroad and then to president of its sprawling operations, including lumbering. For 25 years he steered the Canadian-controlled Mexico North Western, until it was sold in 1944 to a Mexican banking group. That was when Hoard settled into retirement in El Paso.

When Villa became boss of Chihuahua, lining up with General Madero in his fight to oust the dictator, Diaz, he had commandeered the railroad as it suited his purposes. He issued his own currency and the railroad had to accept it for services—or else. Getting rid of it was something else again. Caught in the middle of the revolutionary wave, the railroad often was sabotaged by Villa's enemies or by his own men. During his absence from Chihuahua all wooden bridges built by the railroad had been burned and a tunnel more than a half-mile in length was destroyed, with 57 victims trapped inside. But the owners fought to keep operating.

ORDERS REPAIRS

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baby because he had killed him." So Hoard cultivated and became a close friend of many of Villa's officers instead.

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VAULT BARE

The vault was bare, as Hoard had said, and he was returned once more to face Villa who told him "You owe your life to your Mexican friends, kid." He spoke again of how badly he had been treated by the U.S. and bitterly remarked that he should have sent his soldiers into El Paso to rob the banks there and "get back into the mountains be-

fore those lazy soldiers of yours could have gotten me.”

While he was being held, Villa wired the railroad’s officials in El Paso that he would kill the Americans unless \$300,000 was sent immediately. Hoard’s friend, Marquez, suggested that he escape and head for the border, but Hoard refused to leave while 40 other North Americans employed at the Madera plant were left behind.

Eventually the U.S. citizens were released, under guard, to return to the border. While en route it was learned that Villa was willing to let the others continue, but would hold Hoard inside Chihuahua for the \$300,000 ransom demanded. For three weeks the party was under guard, but Villa backed down—if only temporarily—and agreed they could return to El Paso, but ordered that Hoard be held as hostage. Hoard bribed the officers guarding him and together with the other Americans returned to El Paso. Gen. Villa personally said to Hoard when he last saw him: “When you are released, return to the United States immediately but return to Mexico in one year and look me up and I’ll have something beneficial to both your country and mine.”

Hoard headed back to the Carolinas but a year later was offered the presidency and managership of the railway and lumber operations, conditions having relaxed again in Mexico. He accepted, but learned that Villa still had \$300,000 in mind. At one point he destroyed some bridges, sending a warning that next time he asked for money they would know he meant business.

“For five years Villa chased me all over Chihuahua,” Hoard recalls, “but I would have seen him in hell before I gave him a nickel. He needed the railroad and we man-

aged to keep it operating in spite of his treats and dynamiting.”

ADOPT SIX

Presumably retired by 1945, Hoard and his wife were raising five nieces and a nephew they had adopted. All were put through school here, and sent to college. Hoard’s sister, the late Miss Lucy Claire Hoard, taught in El Paso schools for many years and was the first principal of Dudley School and assistant professor of education at her death.

Hoard became a patron of local politics, helping individuals he thought were sincere about helping the community, but idleness was wearing on him. In 1950 he resurrected a dormant insurance company, Best Life, and with his usual energy threw himself into building it into a substantial El Paso-based operation. He succeeded and watched it merge with Fortune Life, of which he is still board chairman at 81, but by now the infant is fully grown and his service to the company today is largely advisory. Most of his efforts were without any compensation and he never asked for anything beyond cash he himself laid out as part of the revival operation.

Hoard had many setbacks through the years, but only one failure. That was when he decided to take a personal whirl at politics in a wide open race of mayor. He campaigned hard, and many friends worked for him, but the years had sapped some of his fighting spirit and when the votes were counted he had lost and was through with personal politics.

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